

TOWERS

The literary magazine of Northern Illinois University.

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The literary magazine of Northern Illinois University.

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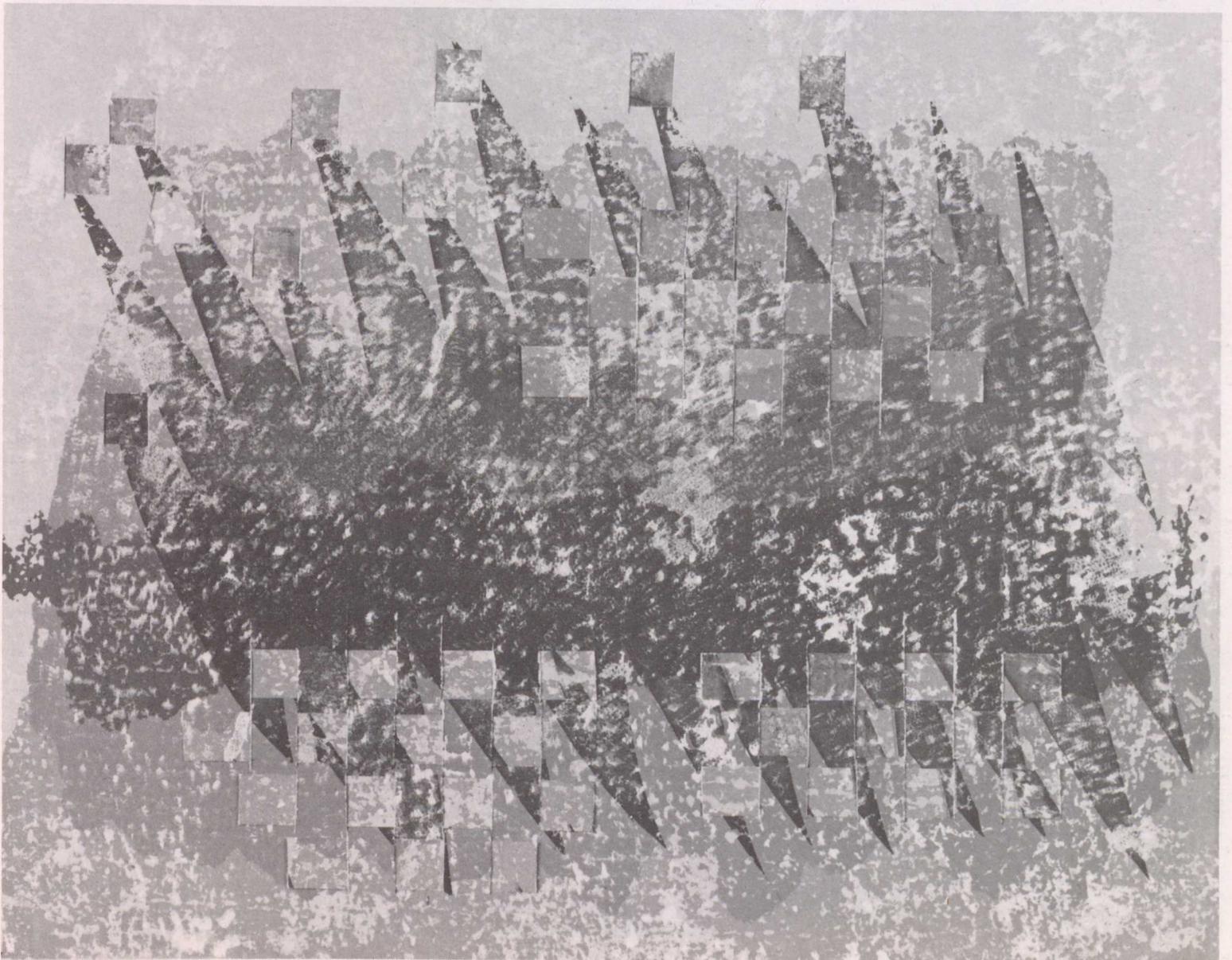
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Interweave Gives Strength *Gina Mellinger-Alicea*

The Diggings

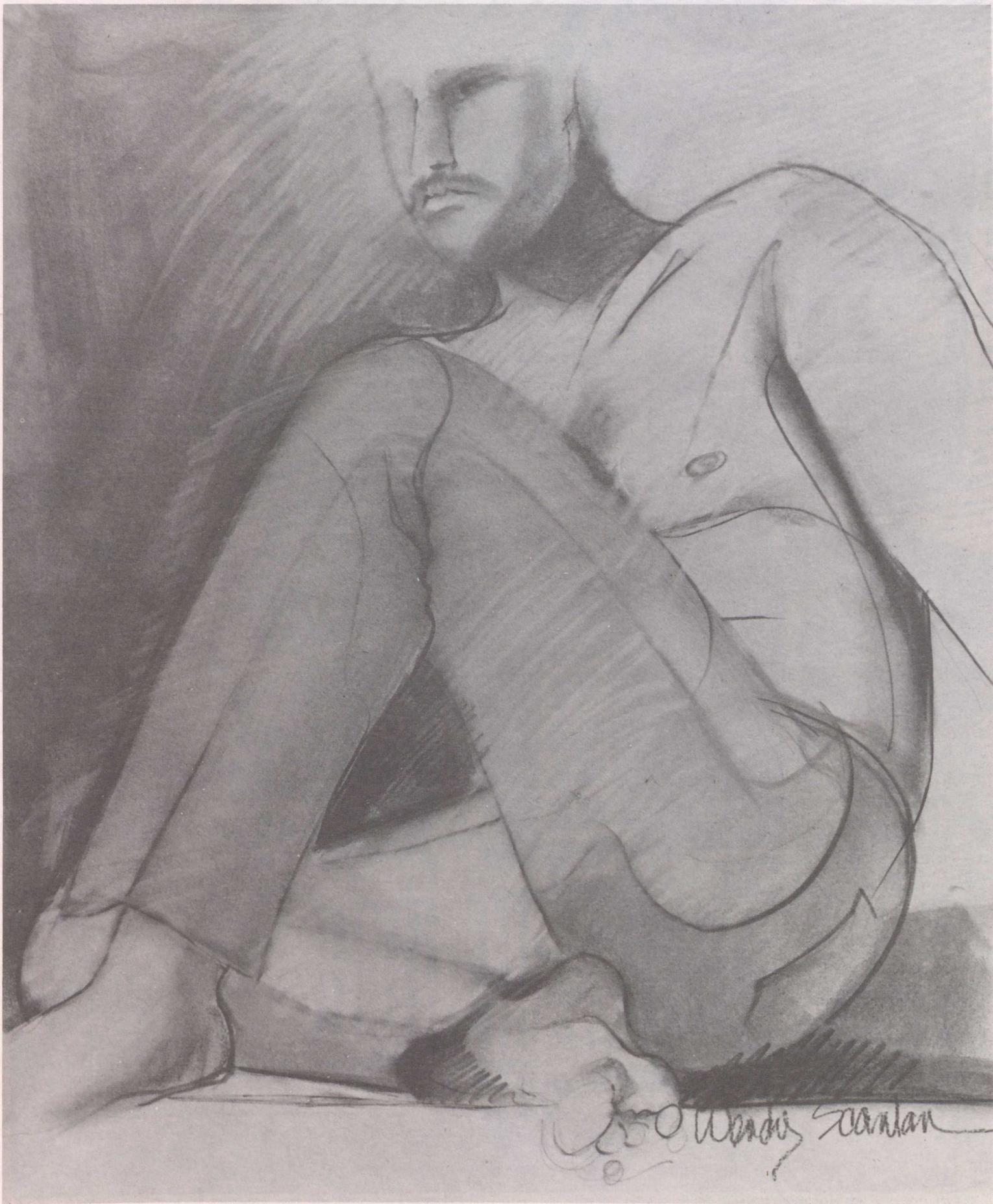
And would you return—after bailing out
Ratty and bold—bewildered, sobbing “mother,”
Your small, skin-wrapped skull still intact,
An arctic-blue vapor swirling
In the hollow thumbprints of some large god—

Would you return to me? Come back
To learn again the positions,
Exude swollen black notes
Like a host of dissociated ants—spun
Antennae, unbleeding thorax, flagged feet—
Here in the sweaty, waxed gymnasium?

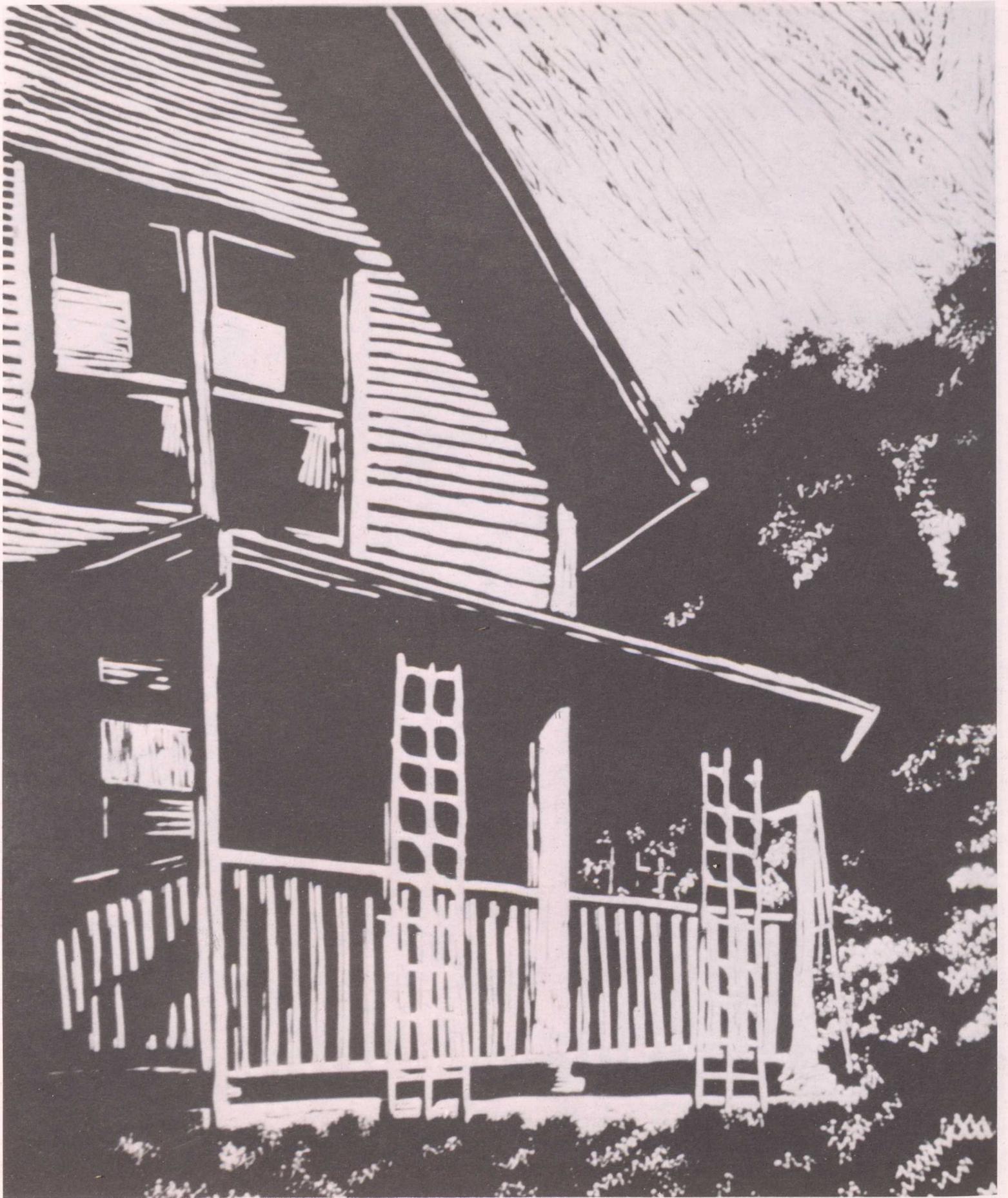
Standing translucent in the overhead light,
The fixed shell of your petrified violin
Pooling blue at your throat, its lobed
Scars like still, crusted wings,
You blink your dusty eyes and begin
My imagined cadenza, a dozen variations, but

This, the whorled message of your return
Pervades me, the slow echo of something remembered:
“I just needed someone to verify me ears,
That this noise is really human.”
And then your face caves in.

Patricia Austin



untitled Wendy Scanlan



7th and Oak Street *Carolyn M. Prince*

Freak Accident

by Joseph Gastiger

Maybe you saw it in the paper. Couple of hikers up this ridge in Idaho, they spot a deer rifle tossed into the brush and, straight above, a skeleton craddled in a tree. Braced there for a year or so, fastened to some branches. Turns out he'd been this General Science teacher from Pendleton who drove up on a hunting trip, climbed up high and waited for the deer to pass: read that trick in a survivalist manual. But he shifted his weight, the safety slipped off; you figure it out. He was reaching for his brandy or another ham sandwich, clammy mist steaming off the thick pines, drizzle beading down the bark. He *did* shoot himself in the stomach, which you almost can't do with a rifle. Divorced, two kids, forty-three years old.

When I was nineteen, my mother killed herself by accident in autumn. I have to tell this to people who don't know me, when we're kidding one another in a booth at the bar and a friend's husband or wife sitting across from me starts asking idle questions about where I'm from, my family. And I cringe, sensing our group turning awkward and pathetic, as I explain what is no mystery at all: my mother tripped down a flight of stairs and died. I won't so much tell people as recite, as if I were quoting a tattered clipping from my mental wallet. Then, our waitress will ask if we'd like another round, though it's pointless. More drinking can't make us silly again.

Once in a long time, somebody already giddily tipsy has laughed. My mother tumbled down our cellar steps. A giggle. Not that I blame anyone. Jesus Christ, most of the accidents you hear about are ludicrous—some man swerves into a beer truck when a wasp lands on his nose; a woman skids on the slick floor at the grocery, toppling the small pyramid of canned soups. A skeleton nestles in a tree. I see the slapstick of how my mother died. Except if somebody laughs because he's drunk, his shame slowly condenses in him, and he looks awful. That person shambles some apology and never meets my eye after, afraid to.

Some night I ought to yell, I'm thirty-four for God's sake, I'm not so sensitive; it's no big deal. But can you say that to people you've met twice before? Can you gesture with your third margarita there in Fenway, and protest how your mother's death is something you've outgrown? Then you're a cold bastard son. You'll pick up how they look at you. That sudden fall of quiet at the table. No, you can't.

Fenway's a kitsch sports bar on Colfax near the capitol. Televisions up in every corner; they carry all the Red Sox games on cable. It's got dim candles and tablecloths, and laminated cards on every table, advising you what's fashionable to drink. Since hardly anybody now in Denver comes from Denver, there's all these lawyers homesick for Cape Cod, CPAs who come west from Rhode Island, Cambridge, market analysts and insurance apparatus:

people who join racquetball clubs. On Wednesday nights around 9:30, you can overhear the stylish knots of people here comparing cozy restaurants in Connecticut, or wistfully insisting on what streets you'd have to turn down to reach their old apartments in Amherst. I don't belong. Fenway's a place I go because it's half a block from our main offices; it's where some people stop off after work.

I had just flown back with Gary from a drill test-site near Lander where we'd spent the past five days camped on a job. Gary reads a few core samples and reports in whether what they're digging at looks worth the estimated cost. I fill up little sacks with soil, wild grasses, and gauge moisture. If the engineers do go ahead to sink a mine or strip the field, I pretend to plan for what ground cover we'll attempt to grow, after we've turned ledges into crumbled rock. How we'll pretty up after the gouging. Actually, I've seen these parts of Georgia and Kentucky where the hills have been "restored" ten years since coal gave out. The landscape can surprise you. It can look like one vast golf park, broken up by sumac, lilacs, wildflowers. Artificial, of course, but scenic in a precise, postcard way. But the soil's richer there, the climate's wet, and ten years disguise most of the trauma. We won't be quite so lucky in the West, where anyone can watch the ground eroding into dust and powder as wind scours it away. Thirty years ahead, huge tracts of Wyoming and Utah will still look like stony rubbish plains of Mars. Everyone in charge of mining knows this, though I still prepare the plans for giant gardens we pretend that we can grow.

We stood waiting for our suitcases at Stapleton. The airport hallway stank of Pinesol and the greenish glow of vapor lamps made passing travelers mottled and worn out. Gary plunked his twenty cents into a phone. His grin announced that he was listening to Carol, though he kept quiet, shrugged and hung up. Gary's a type you saw in high school study hall, the red-faced, gangly kid who poked you and told dirty jokes whenever you were copying his algebra. Gary still wears that look of dogged eagerness to please. Bosses like that.

"Crap, she's gone out already, but it's eight," he said. "So we'll meet her at Fenway for a drink. Jesus, who the hell sounds sexy on an answering machine? But she does. The lady *does*," he wagged.

Across the tunnel, I could hear sluggish conveyers kicking on. The packs and bags came tumping down the chute.

"I should get married to Carol," Gary said. "Plus she makes about twice what I do. We got to find you somebody; you're a monk. The only girl I ever seen you with was Patsy, 'bout a year ago. So maybe Carol knows a friend you ought to meet."

And since I didn't argue, we went and grabbed the luggage, stepped out in the muggy July dark, found my car

and headed in to Fenway.

They sat huddled near the back as we came in. Naturally, Carol brightened as she spied us down the crowded aisle. Beside her was a boyish-looking woman with straw hair clipped short, wearing a lime polo shirt and white slacks.

"Completely a coincidence," fussed Gary as we budged our way. "It's Anita, and she's probably too screwed up to consider."

I guess that it was Carol's idea.

"So you got back," drawled Carol as she half-rose, landing a quick peck on Gary's chin. We stopped and slid into the wooden booth. "I guess it must've gone okay in Montana or Wyoming, or wherever you guys had to look at rocks?"

"Well, it was boring, and hot, and no place to get a beer," said Gary. "There's just these corrugated sheds and crews of workmen who look like maybe they'd been hired off a chain gang. Don't you ever go up there looking like *that*."

So Carol flicked aside the compliment. She *was* someone immediately sexual, though not in any photo layout way. She had a long thin nose, a sort of angular face, and tied her brown hair back almost severely. In her cool yellow sun dress, she had become vaguely Mediterranean, part-Spanish, part-Italian, maybe French somewhere. I didn't remember. I'm not any good at this; I never found out her last name.

"You two don't know each other yet," she said, and introduced frail, nervous Anita. That was when it registered that what made Carol striking was her voice, how it could hook you.

I smiled at the pale woman across from me who squinted past me at the set droning above my shoulder. "Great," piped Anita suddenly, just as some pairs of men at neighbor tables hollered out and banged their glasses down. "Oh, I'm sorry Paul," she answered. "It's just, well, Jim Rice hit a double."

Gary pivoted, studied the screen. "What inning? What's the score?"

Anita told him. Our waitress came.

The next hour or so, I nursed two drinks and kept up small talk with Carol. Gary or Anita made a comment now and then, about the game. Carol was a lawyer for an insurance company, she told me. The name brought up a sour taste from memory, but nothing you can hold against a person. Nothing you should bitch about at Fenway. Plenty of people work for companies of cheats; I do myself. In fact, Carol must've thought I looked impressed. Her voice began to gloat more as she drank.

"You wouldn't *believe* what people try to foist on us," she was saying. "This jerk, for instance, takes us to court because we wouldn't cover surgery to get his hand fixed

after a fight? Denied his claim? This guy was beating up the owner of a Texaco, I mean robbing the place, until the owner's doberman runs out the garage. You know these thugs try to plead they have coverage?" She laughed.

"What's the 'DH?'," broke in Anita.

I blinked at her. The Twins had beaten Boston, nine to seven.

"I don't know these initials from baseball," she said, fluttering her hands in a deliberately dopey climb. "I've got a son watches every game there is, so I try to learn whatever to have something to talk about, but 'DH,' 'RBI,' 'ERA,' don't mean a thing to me yet."

"The 'DH' is 'designated hitter,'" I said, "usually some old pro they keep around to get a hit when he's not as good fielding as he used to be. Like Yaz. 'RBI' is 'runs batted in'—"

"And 'ERA' means *nothing*, if you're Boston," added Gary peevishly. "For it to mean anything, first you need a pitcher. Which the Red Sox never have."

"Yaztrzemski's not playing this year. Aren't you a Boston fan?," Anita asked me.

"I guess so. If they're on when I get here, sometimes, yeah."

"So you didn't grow up around Boston?"

"Nope. I lived in San Diego."

"I just assumed," grinned Anita, "because you came here. My parents live in Rochester; they always did. But I went to school in Boston with Car—"

"San Diego? That's supposed to be the best place to live. Isn't it supposed to be number three or four in that book?," Carol slurred.

"San Diego," said Gary, "is terrific for the weather and the ocean, but it's even worse spread out with all these Pizza Huts and Shop 'N Go's with less of any place to really go than Denver. That's what I heard," he nodded.

"They've got that *zoo*," Carol persisted. "You can ride an elephant at that big zoo."

"Is it really bad as Denver?," asked Anita. "When I first moved out here, I felt, hey, terrific, Rocky Mountains, like on calendars. John Denver. But except I like my job—"

"Probably *now* it is bad as Denver. I haven't gone back about fifteen years. You know," I said to Carol, like a fool, "your company tried to screw me out there."

"Doesn't surprise me." But she did sit up a little defensively, covered Gary's hand with her own. "So what'd you do, back into somebody, like that?"

"I run a gallery on Ogden—," Anita interrupted, but she stopped once she saw we weren't listening.

"I didn't do anything," I said. "It was my mother. When she died. And they weren't going to pay me for a year. The last time I was in San Diego."

I felt that silence, turned embarrassed. I had brought it on.

"So what the fuck happened?," asked Gary quietly.

And I told them all by rote. My mother had the old house to herself. She got home early from work, she was standing in the kitchen cracking ice out of an ice tray, and she might've heard or thought she heard some noise from down the basement. We guess so. Probably, she yelled, "Harold?," or "Paul," or "Who's down there?," at first. Then, she went into the bedroom, found the practice pistol in the dresser drawer with all those faded pictures and papers from my dad. These cop shows make women alone cautious.

And my mother must have stumbled on the staircase, because they found her—Harold found her—sprawled out, crumpled at the bottom. The gun had actually fired twice, but she was hit only once, behind her ear. The other bullet tore a dime-sized hole in our water heater.

"And this company you work for," I finished, "tried to argue for suspicion of suicide. 'Cause of the gun. I mean, God damn it, where's the sense? How does somebody go to shoot herself one day, but takes a practice shot *first* at the boiler? Who the hell could argue this?"

"I can see how they would try," Carol said. "But without, you know, some other indications, like long-term depressive illness, like some sort of corroborated warning signs. . . ."

"Oh, don't talk like a lawyer, talk *real*. You don't go blow a hole in the water heater. That's just stupid. She fell. She heard a noise, but there was nobody there, and she fell."

Gary scrunched his brow like an amateur detective. "Are they sure there was nobody? Could there really maybe been this guy, and maybe—who knows?—she was *pushed*?"

"And nobody was around," Anita echoed. "That's so sad." For the first time, I thought, she was staring into me with genuine interest.

"When something like that happens—," Carol wavered. "Everybody. Everybody who finds out I work for this insurance firm, everybody has a personal story to prove how we're all conniving bastards. Everybody thinks we're greedy, ghoulish assholes."

"He's got good reason to be angry," said Anita.

"I'm not 'angry' anymore. But Christ, my mother gets killed; she's a young woman, and I have to answer questions for three months about if she was depressed, if she was a drinker, if she had a lover or whatever."

"Your folks divorced?," said Gary. "Isn't anybody else having a drink?"

"Well, Paul," lectured Carol, "*anytime* in case of accidental death, you have the laws that say we have to, *have* to carry out a standard inquest. Before the policy gets settled. That's the way it is."

"And Jesus, what do we do?," Gary added. "We go up

someplace, we check it out, so they can rubble all these mountains into shit heaps. People *bate* us, Paulie. The Sierra Club, for instance. *You* try to argue with some backpackers anytime about your job?"

"You ever tell anybody that you're working for 'Big Oil,' work for Kennecott or Anaconda, any mining company, trying to explain what you do? You'd get the same reaction," said Carol. "That's right. I could say, well, I could say the both of you are pimping bastards going to destroy the West." Carol savored her little taste of triumph.

"I didn't tell you, 'feel guilty,'" I answered. "I'm not calling you an asshole. I'm not calling any names."

"You're just saying," helped Anita, "that not everytime you get a case, Carol, that the company's right."

"Sometimes we do fuck people over, I concede," said Carol. "So are we all finally friends again?" She winked and spilled a little of her drink.

But we weren't friends yet. There was silence.

"You never mentioned that before to me," said Gary, pouring a fresh beer into his glass. "Christ, it sounds unbelievable. Shoots herself tripping down the stairs."

And then as graciously as I have seen it done, no more perceptibly than if she'd caught a small bit of olive swallowing, Carol suppressed a squeak of laughter.

"I'm feeling *drunk*," she stammered, but I looked away.

"Think we'll call it a night, huh?," Gary covered.

"Oh God, it's quarter to twelve? I've got to get the babysitter home," said Anita.

So we paid up and left. The way we ended it, I walked out with Anita, three blocks over to her car. We almost floated in embarrassment together, watching our reflections glide across the darkened windows of the offices, small bakeries and jewelry stores.

"I feel real sorry for the two of them," she muttered. "I went to B. U. with Carol, and she's got that bitchy edge, but, well, beneath that. Beneath that, she really is a rich brat."

"I've only met her two, three times. But how people *react*, like if they laugh like that. They really don't mean anything, they can't help it. Gary, too."

"Is he really as much of a reptile as he comes off?"

"Pretty often," I said, and so we smiled, walking more in step now, pleasantly conspiratorial.

"You think I'm awful too?" She stopped. "I mean, I watch the stupid game, and then this business with *insurance*, and we go home. Was this supposed to be a date? Were you set up?"

We reached her car, a light blue Chevy, in the shadow cast by footlights in the shrubbery around United Bank, and stood there awkwardly.

"If I can call you, maybe we can meet for lunch without those guys. You work on Ogden? If it's alright."

"I guess, okay. Look up the only 'A. Gottlieb' in the phone book."

"Well, thanks," I said. "I mean, I don't *always* talk about my mother, or the job, or that stuff. But I appreciate you showed a little. . . ."

"You don't know. Shit. Look it, my kid, Randy? Got cerebral palsy. This kid is eight. He hardly talks, can't dress himself—and that's for life. All because some asshole—," and her voice broke, "some asshole riding in a station wagon backed right into him at Safeway. And you think *you* went through it, right, with lawyers, the insurance, all of that? Figure your mother had her life. You have it easy."

So we said goodnight. I was half-drunk too, or I was sorry, but I felt ready to cry.

I got home a half-hour later, found some gin left in the cabinet, and sat there in the dinette remembering the month before my mother tripped and died. There was pudgy Harold Benz, her boyfriend/boss, owner of Benz' Home Improvement Center, "Everything to Make *Your* House a *Home*," everything from paneling and linoleum to chandeliers and built-in blue aquariums that took up half a wall. A Sunday night my older sister Ellen called me up at Cal State to tattle there was "something going on," because she'd seen his white Camaro in our driveway, overnight.

"But he's *married*," Ellen had whined, "and she even knows his wife!"

"Yeah, so she's forty-three; she's doing what she wants." I was surprised, I guess, and didn't much like sixtyish Harold Benz, but this was 1970. In California.

"God damn it," Ellen fumed, "you see what's happening? Mom is *remodeling* the house—putting new carpet down, new lamp fixtures and all that crap, so she can sell the place for lots. And she is getting this terrific *deal*, Paul, because she's sleeping with the fucking boss!"

So what was I supposed to say? My mother, Lorraine Murray, was attractive. Sunday Catholic. As far as I could tell, she hadn't slept with anybody all the time we lived at home, never since my father drove a jeep over a land mine in Korea, when I was two years old. Corporal Tommy Murray in the photograph, that relic in the tv room, that every year or so slipped off its bent nail and bounced behind the sofa. Blown up at twenty-seven, "Tommy" mom and Uncle Jimmy always called him; "When 'Tommy' was alive, he loved to. . . ." And for my whole childhood, my ghostly father was this "Tommy" with a baby face and crew-cut, never "Thomas," never "Tom." A man from a cartoon.

"Ellen, butt out," I had yelled, had held the phone away. Though I recoiled from an image of the oily, bald Benz bedding my mother.

I dragged into the living room, and I remembered how

I'd heard that she was dead. Fall semester of my sophomore year at Davis, I was half the time fumbling in bed with Barbara. Barbara was an older art major who lived three or four miles north of school by bike or bus. I used to stop back at my place maybe twice a week, just to grab clean clothes. One Thursday in October, at an 8:00 Chem class, I ran in late with my hair still wet. I took a side seat in the lecture hall, just as Dr. Lloyd clipped on his microphone, just as he was turning to the flicked-on diagram of either ether or benzene.

"Is there a Paul Murray here today?," he asked, and I was startled. He had mumbled off my name from the long computer roster of two hundred. "Would Paul Murray please step up here?," he said.

And I felt shaky; I was wild for some excuse. I was certain that somehow he meant I'd been thrown out of class because I'd skipped too many mornings, missed some quizzes. But when Lloyd spotted me coming down the aisle, he wasn't angry. "Mr. Murray," he purred thoughtfully, regretfully, "Mr. Murray, there's an urgent message for you. A lot of people have been trying to get hold of you this week. Would you call," he went on, holding out a slip of memo paper, "would you call home right away from the department office?" The bearded man seemed anxious to get rid of me.

I had never felt so singled out before, wobbling on the little platform, a sudden random, ludicrous celebrity. I shuffled out before two hundred whisperers. "I'm very sorry," Lloyd nodded, and he swung back to the next molecule on the overhead.

I stumbled out and dialed collect the unfamiliar number on my folded paper. Mrs. Harold Benz answered. My mother had been dead for three days.

The last breakfast I ate in San Diego, Christ, fifteen years ago, I bent contrite over my Spanish omelet, sitting in a Denny's about 10:30, listening to Harold grieve. I had the bank check for nine-thousand-eighteen dollars tucked inside my jacket pocket.

"This destroyed me," he was pleading to the window. A dirty-streaked delivery van, Sullivan's Office Supply, was chugging puffs of pink smoke as it idled in the parking lot. "I lost your mother. My wife. My married daughter tells me, don't you call. All the time, questions from police."

"I can't eat," he turned to me, "I can't eat this." Harold put aside his fork. "Have my piece of toast, if you want."

The small man put his knuckles to his lips and wept quietly.

My telephone was ringing somewhere else.

But I must've lain there drowsing on the couch. I was dreaming I was climbing up a wooded ridge some time long after twilight. We were a straggling line of people carrying lanterns, maybe twenty of us, led along a narrow

trail through pines. I was with the search party; we were tired; we had clambered up cold hills the whole day. Around me swam the rag-tag, dusty retinue of ghosts in any dream: people from my gym squad in eighth grade, people who rang up and bagged my groceries, nameless people I would see in Fenway, and Anita, and ahead, Harold Benz. Every twenty yards or so, we'd have to stop while Harold called and pointed up, up toward a skeleton forgotten in some tree. The woods were full of skeletons

in trees, and we would find them all, would pull them all down, and check our lists.

I shook my head and grabbed the ringing phone.

"Hey Paul, I know it's late," said Gary, and I heard the muffled voice quibble beside him. "But it's Carol. She's all upset; she thinks you've got to hate her now. You know, she's sorry, can you talk to her, okay?"

I cradled the receiver, said okay. ▣



Scarecrow William Cantafio

The Cricket's Song

Listen

You can hear a cricket

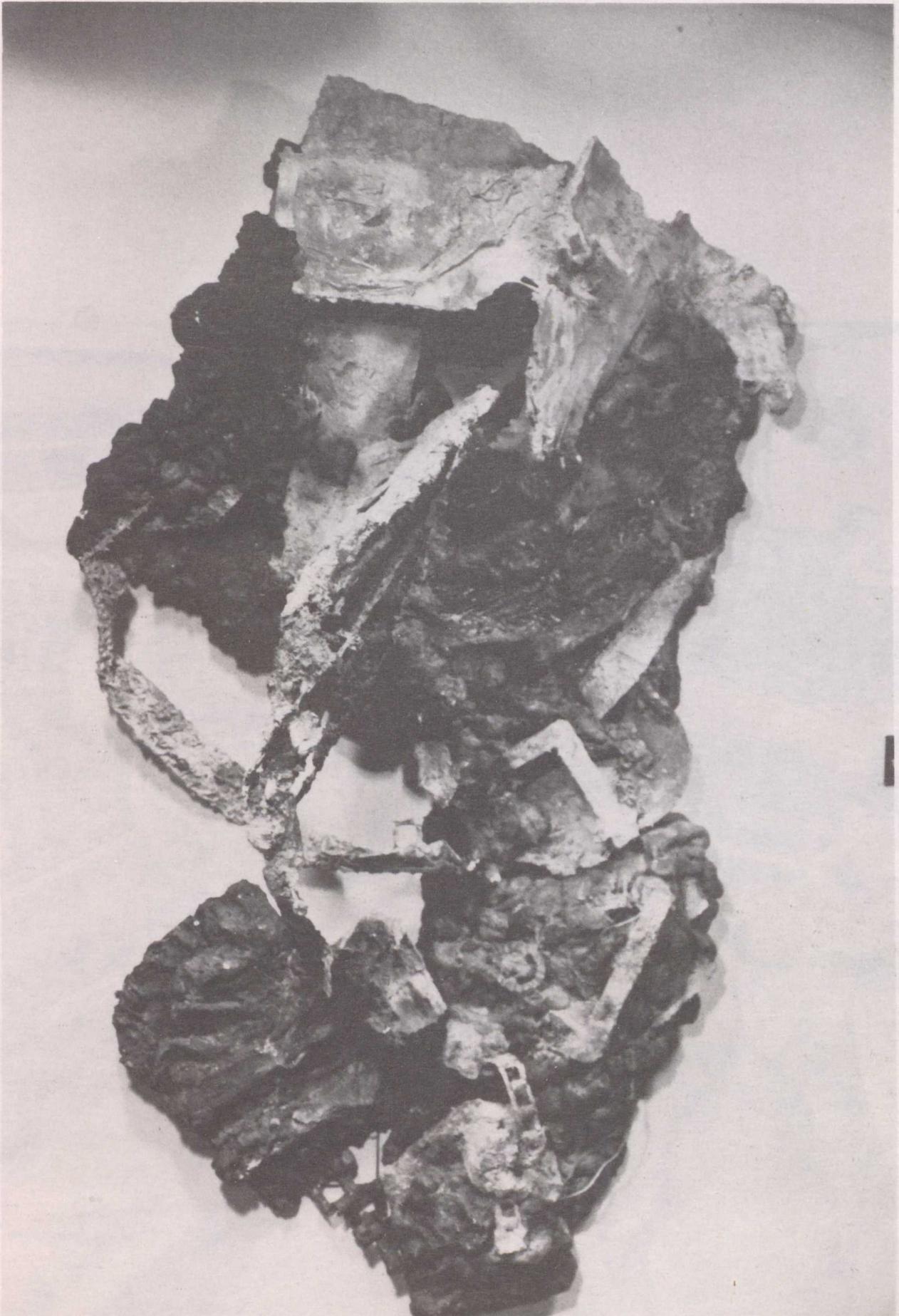
Listen

You can almost hear what he is singing

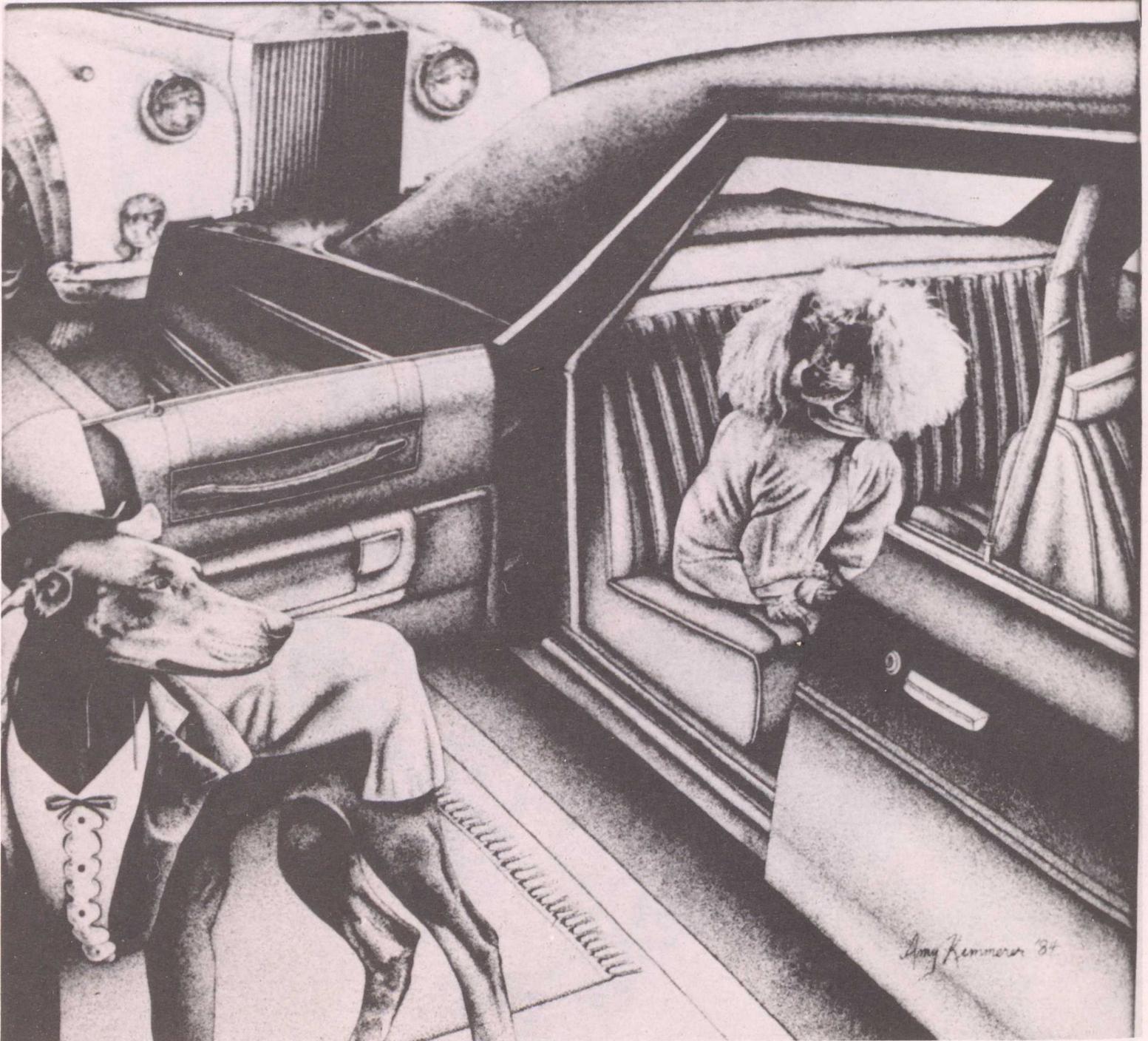
Wierd white music
From a small black bug
In the middle of the night

At dawn
I lay my hands
On the oak's rough bark
 of the cricket's song
I rub my thumb over my fingertips
And feel the crumbs
 of the cricket's song
And I see a glow
Across my palms
 of the cricket's song

Paul Engel



Cycle *Timothy Norris*



Premiere Night Amy Kemmerer

Under The Colorfully Lighted Sign Of The Video Arcade

Outside, under the colorfully lighted sign of the video
arcade, the thin boys of night, wait for life,
in their faded blue jeans and their faded blue jean
jackets, and black rock concert t-shirts.

They wish they had a pack of Marlboros,
or a six-pack of Bud, or Penthouse Magazine,
or better yet, the real thing, suzy, with her
big tits and nice ass.

But if they can't have that,
Then they want it All,
They want to scream the questions
When and
How!
They want the Answers,
They want them *Now!*

Under the colorfully lighted sign of the video arcade.

Paul Engel

Mother's Daughter

Trapped in a maternal mask
I act to an
unresponding
paternal audience
who has
subliminal atrocities
of mother
playing on his mind
and who can't
escape
memories of madness
preserved through biology.

Carolyn Kleppe

The So-What? School of Poetry

Quiet convenient.
That's what I call it. Everything
comes over but not across, we get left
holding the bag of perception. Heart attacks
have this feeling, first
in the wrist, then climbing
up cold shoulders
with sad redundancy.
The zen archer knows
nothing of this.

Your look spoils bad poetry. Working hard
to get the bruise in good light, the effect of
popcorn at a bad B-picture if it's stale.

Words already there close the curtains, soften
the focus, send in Vivaldi's seasons and two
asprin, fall asleep in your chair.
You can rouse them, but they go back
to sleep and refuse to move.

How to make the heart sing in a grave yard:
Give it the music and a quick warm up,
let it make its own scale and miss
a few notes.

Cat on

the

keys,

or a similar

risk

clearly

a matter of more than style.

So how do you take your images? I'll have the ground
straight up.

Bret Hamilton



Sheanut *Peter Petramale*

K-Mart Holocaust

Did he scream
Here, have some of my pain?

Shattered skin and glass
plastic shards of headless mannequins
with French-cut necks
Sighs from mouths unable to react
and that was all there was.

That was a special case
a once-in-a-lifetime incident.
We don't need that kind of shit
in our lives.

One of the policemen
shot off his lower jaw;
he died in the ambulance
his tongue, a useless appendage,
dangling

Each survivor said to himself,
or to others,
I don't need that kind of shit.

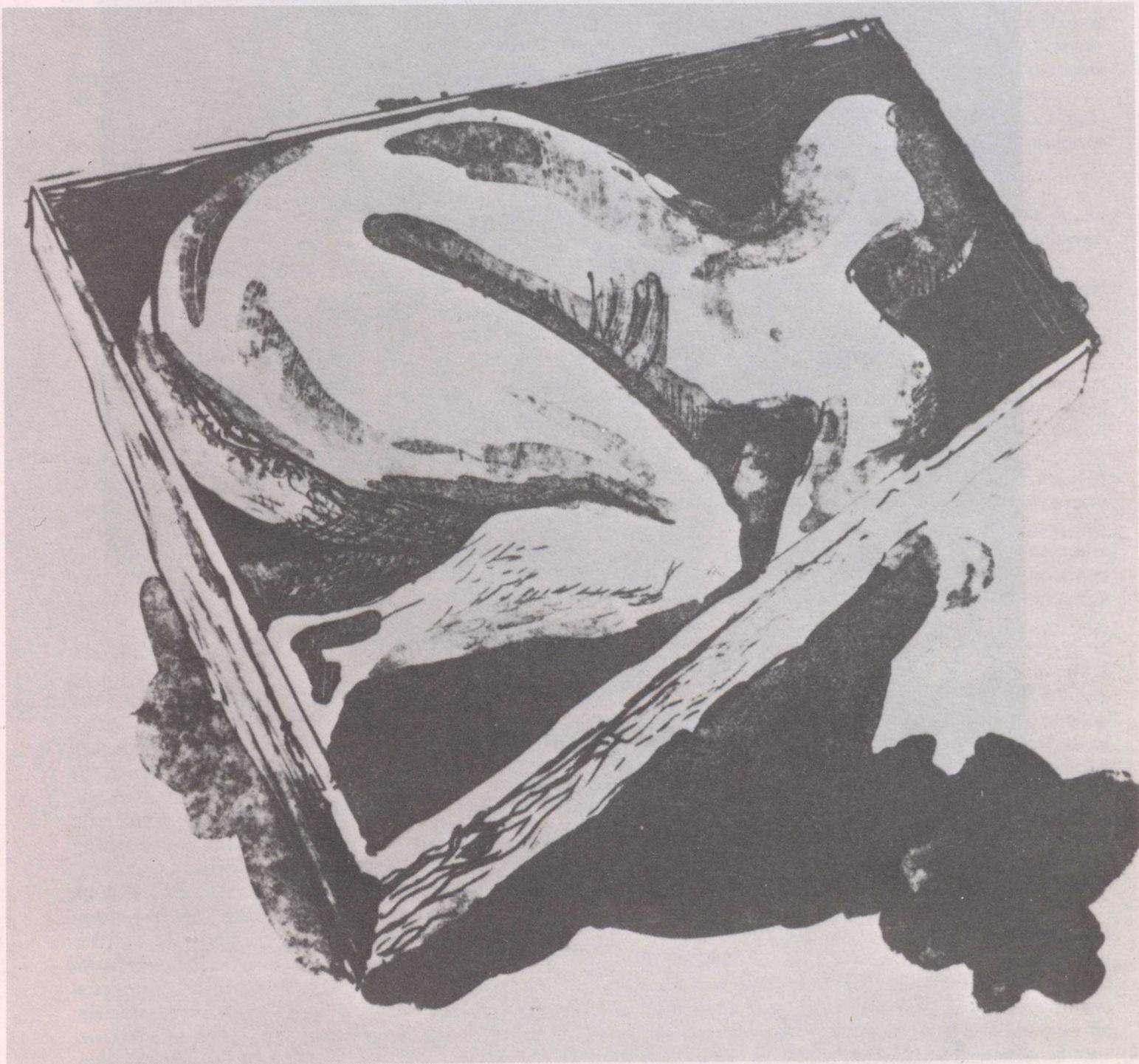
Phillip Craig

Layers of Skin, Unfeeling

Past the pale blue distance
Of a cynical eye,
Under the hallow damp darkness
Of a sunless sky,
The echo of your laughter
follows close,
though I try to hide.

And so I am ready to swallow
the layers of skin unfeeling,
I am ready to cast aside the
numbers and news
and even jazz
and even blues,
scrape
to the bone,
and search for home.

Dan Smolla



untitled *Terri Guise*



Marcos *Rob Wilson*

Opus Zero: Art as Revolution

by Kevin Esser

I

Justice cannot be obtained under any law; action in accord with spontaneous nature, action which is just, cannot be defined by dogma. The crimes advocated in these texts cannot be committed against self or others but only against the mordant crystallization of Ideas into structures of poisonous Thrones and Dominations. That is, not crimes against nature or humanity but crimes by legal fiat. Sooner or later the uncovering and unveiling of self/nature transmogrifies a person into a brigand—like stepping into another world then returning to this one to discover you've been declared a traitor, heretic, exile.

The law waits for you to stumble on a mode of being, a soul different from the FDA-approved purple-stamped standard dead meat—and as soon as you begin to act in harmony with nature the law garottes and strangles you—so don't play the blessed liberal middleclass martyr—accept the fact that you're a criminal and be prepared to act like one.

Paradox: To embrace chaos is not to slide toward entropy but to emerge into an energy like stars, a pattern of instantaneous grace—a spontaneous organic order completely different from the carrion pyramids of sultans, muftis, cadis, and grinning executioners.

After chaos comes Eros—the principle of order implicit in the nothingness of the unqualified One. Love is structure, system, the only code untainted by slavery and drugged sleep. We must become crooks and con-men to protect its spiritual beauty in a bezel of clandestinity, a hidden garden of espionage.

Don't just survive while waiting for someone's revolution to clear your head, don't sign up for the armies of anorexia or bulimia—act as if you were already free, calculate the odds, step out, remember the Code Duello—Smoke Pot/Eat Chicken/Drink Tea. Every man his own vine and fig tree (*Circle Seven Koran*, Noble Drew Ali)—carry your Moorish passport with pride, don't get caught in the cross fire, keep your back covered—but take the risk, dance before you calcify.

The natural social model for ontological anarchism is the child-gang or the bank-robbers-band. Money is a lie—this adventure must be feasible without it—booty and pillage should be spent before they turn back into dust. Today is Resurrection Day—money wasted on beauty will be alchemically transmuted into elixir. As my Uncle Peter used to say, stolen watermelon tastes sweeter.

The world is already re-made according to the heart's desire; but civilization owns all the leases and most of the guns. Our feral angels demand we trespass, for they manifest themselves only on forbidden grounds. Highway men. The yoga of stealth, the lightning raid, the enjoyment of treasure.

II

Poetic Terrorism: Weird dancing in allnight computer banking lobbies. Unauthorized pyrotechnic displays. Land-art, earth-works as bizarre alien artifacts strewn in state parks. Pick someone at random and convince them they're the heir to an enormous, useless and amazing fortune—say five thousand square miles of Antarctica, or an aging circus elephant, or an orphanage in Bombay, or a collection of alchemical manuscripts. Later they will come to realize that for a few moments they believed in something extraordinary, and will perhaps be driven as a result to seek out some more intense mode of existence.

Bolt up brass commemorative plaques in places (public or private) where you have experienced a revelation or had a particularly fulfilling sexual experience.

Go naked for a sign.

Organize a strike in your school or workplace on the grounds that it does not satisfy your need for indolence and spiritual beauty.

Graffiti art loaned some grace to ugly subways and rigid public monuments. PT-art can also be created for public places: poems scrawled in courthouse lavatories, small fetishes abandoned in parks and restaurants, Xerox-art under windshield wipers of parked cars, Big Character Slogans pasted on playground walls, anonymous letters mailed to random or chosen recipients (mail fraud), pirate radio transmissions, wet cement.

The audience reaction or aesthetic shock produced by PT ought to be at least as strong as the emotion of terror—powerful disgust, sexual arousal, superstitious awe, sudden intuitive breakthrough, dada-esque angst—no matter whether the PT is aimed at one person or many, no matter whether it is signed or anonymous, if it does not change someone's life (aside from the artist) it fails.

PT is an act in a Theatre of Cruelty that has no stage, no rows of seats, no tickets and no walls. In order to work at all, PT must categorically be divorced from all conventional structures for art consumption (galleries, publications, media). Even the guerilla Situationist tactics of street theatre are perhaps too well-known and expected now.

An exquisite seduction carried out not only in the cause of mutual satisfaction but also as a conscious act in a deliberately beautiful life—this may be the ultimate PT. The Pterrorist behaves like a confidence-trickster whose aim is not money but CHANGE.

Don't do PT for other artists, do it for people who will not realize (at least for a few moments) that what you have done is art. Avoid recognizable art categories, avoid politics, don't stick around to argue, don't be sentimental; be ruthless, take risks, vandalize only what *must* be defaced, do something children will remember all their

lives—but don't be spontaneous unless the PT Muse has possessed you.

Dress up. Leave a false name. Be legendary. The best PT is against the law, but don't get caught. Art as crime; crime as art.

III

Art Sabotage strives to be perfectly exemplary but at the same time retain an element of opacity—not propaganda but aesthetic shock—appallingly direct yet also subtly angled: action-as-metaphor.

Art Sabotage is the dark side of Poetic Terrorism—creation through destruction—but it cannot serve any Party, nor any nihilism, nor even art itself. Just as the banishment of illusion enhances awareness, so the demolition of aesthetic blight sweetens the air of the world of discourse, of the Other. Art Sabotage serves only consciousness, attentiveness, awakeness.

A-S goes beyond paranoia, beyond deconstruction—the ultimate criticism—physical attack on offensive art, aesthetic jihad. The slightest taint of petty egoicity or even of personal taste spoils its purity and vitiates its force. A-S can never seek power—only *release* it.

Individual art works (even the worst) are largely irrelevant. A-S seeks to damage institutions that use art to diminish consciousness and profit by delusion. This or that poet or painter cannot be condemned for lack of vision; but malign Ideas can be assaulted through the artifacts they generate. MUZAK is designed to hypnotize and control; its machinery can be smashed.

Public book burnings: why should red-necks and Customs officials monopolize this weapon? Novels about children possessed by demons; *New York Times* best-seller lists; feminist tracts against pornography; school books (especially Social Studies, Civics, Health); piles of *New York Post*, *Village Voice* and other supermarket papers; choice gleanings of Christian publishers; a few Harlequin Romances—a festive atmosphere, wine bottles and joints passed around on a clear autumn afternoon.

To throw money away at the stock exchange was pretty decent Poetic Terrorism—but to *destroy* the money would have been good Art Sabotage. To seize TV transmission and broadcast a few pirated minutes of incendiary Chaote art would continue a feat of PT—but simply to blow up the transmission tower would be perfectly adequate Art Sabotage.

If certain galleries and museums deserve an occasional brick through their windows—not destruction, but a jolt to complacency—then what about *banks*? Galleries turn beauty into a commodity, but banks transmute Imagination into feces and debt. Wouldn't the world gain a

degree of beauty with each bank that could be made to tremble. . . . or fall? But how? Art Sabotage should probably stay away from politics (it's so boring)—but not from banks.

When ugliness, poor design and stupid waste are forced upon you, turn Luddite, throw your shoe in the works, retaliate. Smash the symbols of the Empire in the name of nothing but the heart's longing for grace.

IV

The full moon's unfathomable light path—mid-May midnight in some state that starts with "I", so two-dimensional it can scarcely be said to possess any geography at all—the beams so urgent and tangible you must draw the shades in order to think in words.

No question of writing *to* Wild Children. They think in images. Prose is for them a code not yet fully digested and ossified, just as for us never fully trusted. You may write *about* them, so that others who have lost the silver chain may follow. Or write *for* them, making of Story and Emblem a process of seduction into your own paleolithic memories, a barbaric enticement to liberty.

For this otherworld species or "third sex," *les enfants sauvages*, Fancy and Imagination are still undifferentiated. Unbridled play: at one and the same time the source of our art and of all the race's rarest eros. To embrace disorder both as wellspring of style and voluptuous storehouse, a fundamental of our alien and occult civilization, our conspiratorial aesthetic, our lunatic espionage—this is the action (let's face it) either of an artist of some sort, or of a ten or thirteen-year-old.

Children whose clarified senses betray them into a brilliant sorcery of beautiful pleasure reflect something feral and smutty in the nature of reality itself: natural ontological anarchists, angels of chaos—their gestures and body odors broadcast around them a jungle of presence, a forest of prescience complete with snakes, ninja weapons, turtles, futuristic shamanism, incredible mess, pies, ghosts, sunlight, masturbation, birds' nests and eggs—gleeful aggression against the groan-ups (sic, very sick) of those Lower Planes so powerless to englobe either destructive epiphanies or creation in the form of antics fragile but sharp enough to slice moonlight.

And yet the denizens of these inferior jerkwater dimensions truly believe they control the destinies of Wild Children—and down here, such vicious beliefs actually sculpt most of the substance of happenstance. The only ones who actually wish to *share* the mischievous destiny of those savage runaways or minor guerillas rather than dictate it, the only ones who can understand that cherishing and unleashing are the same act—these are mostly

artists, anarchists, perverts, heretics, a band apart (as much from each other as from the world) or able to meet only as Wild Children might, locking gazes across a dinner table while adults gibber from behind their masks.

Too young for Harley choppers—flunk-outs, break-dancers, scarcely pubescent poets of flat lost railroad towns—a million sparks falling from the sky-rockets of Rimbaud and Mowgli—slender terrorists whose gaudy bombs are compacted of polymorphous love and the precious shards of popular culture—punk gunslingers dreaming of piercing their ears, animist bicyclists gliding in the pewter dusk through Welfare streets of accidental flowers—out-of-season gypsy skinny-dippers, smiling sideways-glancing thieves of power-totems, small change and panther-bladed knives. We sense them everywhere; we publish this offer to trade the corruption of our own *lux et gaudium* for their perfect gentle filth.

So get this: *Our* realization, our liberation depends on theirs—not because we ape the Family, those “misers of love” who hold hostages for a banal future, nor the State which schools us all to sink beneath the event-horizon of a tedious “usefulness”—no!—but because we and they, the wild ones, are images of each other, linked and bordered by that silver chain which defines the pale of sensuality, transgression and vision.

We share the same enemies and our means of triumphant escape are also the same: a delirious and obsessive *play*, powered by the spectral brilliance of the wolves and their children.

V

This is not prose. It may be pinned to the board but it's still alive and wriggling. It does not want to seduce you unless you're young and good-looking (enclose recent photo).

The author lives in a seedy Chinese hotel where the proprietor nods out over a newspaper and scratchy broadcasts of Peking Opera. The ceiling fan turns like a sluggish dervish—sweat falls on the page—the poet's kaftan is rusty, his ovals spill ash on the rug—his monologues seem disjointed and slightly sinister—outside shuttered windows the barrio fades into palm trees, the naive blue ocean, the philosophy of tropicalismo.

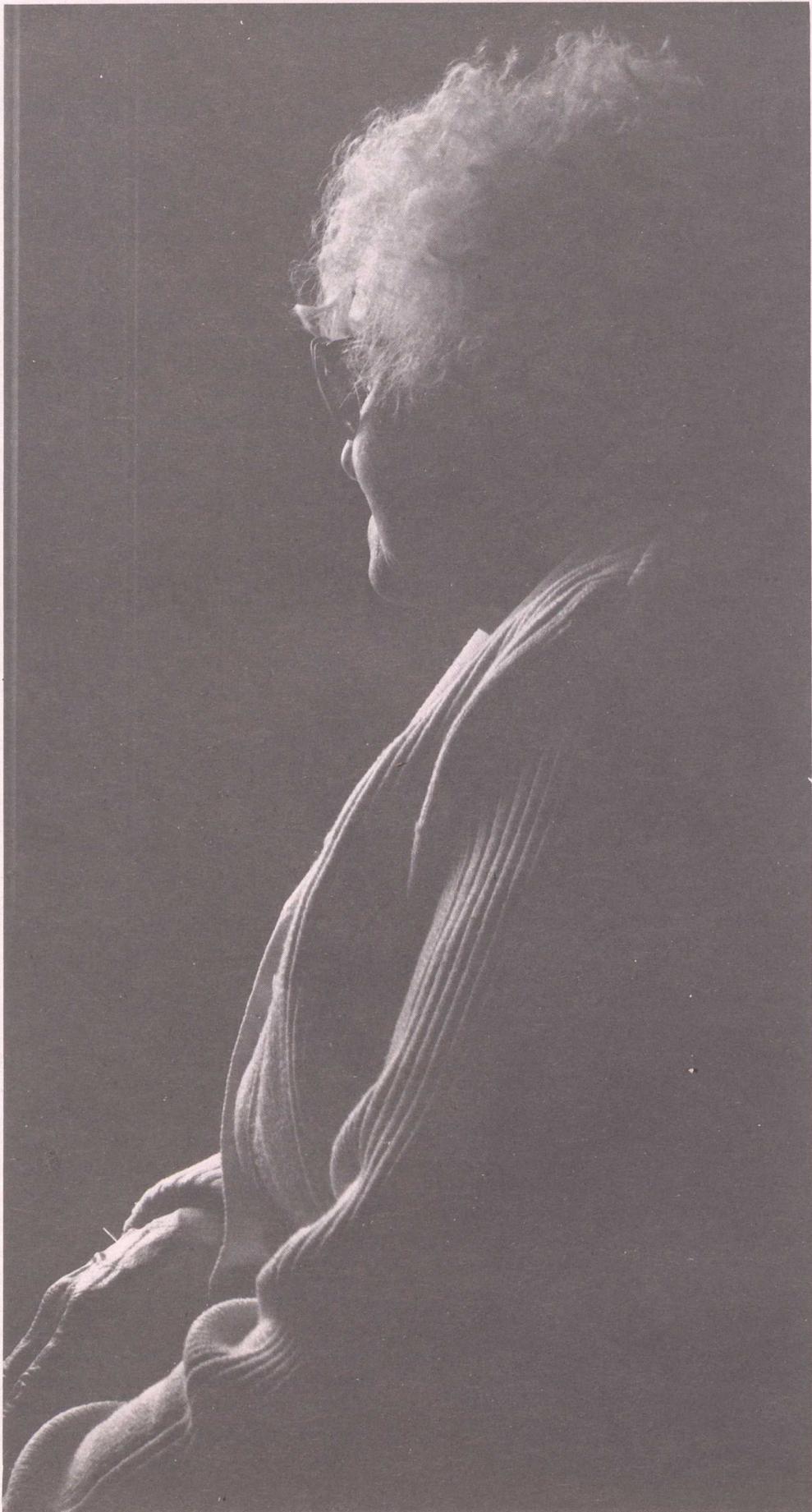
Along a highway somewhere west of Chicago you pass an Airstream trailer with a big sign on the lawn—SPIRITUAL READINGS—and the image of a crude black hand on a red background. Inside you notice a display of dream books, numbers books, pamphlets on Hoodoo and Santeria, dusty old nudist magazines, treatises on fighting cocks—and this text. Like words spoken in a

dream. Portentious, evanescent, changing into perfumes, birds, colors, forgotten music.

This text distances itself by a certain impassibility of surface, almost a glassiness. It doesn't wag its tail and it doesn't snarl; it bites and humps the furniture. It doesn't have an ISBN number and it doesn't want you for a disciple.

This text is nervous like coffee or malaria. It sets up a network of cut-outs and safe drops between itself and its readers; but it's so bald-faced and literal-minded it practically encodes itself. It smokes itself into a stupor. A mask, an automythology, a map without placenames—stiff as an Egyptian wall painting, nevertheless it reaches to caress someone's face—and suddenly finds itself out in the street, in a body, quivering with light, walking, awake. Almost satisfied. ▣

FIN



"...At Eighty-Five..." *Charles Gneich, Jr.*

Honour Thy Father and Thy Mother That Their Days . . .

Hundreds of cars—my Father is buying up
Hundreds of cheap little metal cars.
“See, real rubber,” his response to all questions
Of health and life at seventy-two,
Spinning the wheels with a dry mechanic’s thumb;
“A door that opens and a hood that lifts
For ninety-nine cents,” Herr Koch raves
As he parks more blacks than greens
On the gilded hems of her vinyl angel collection

It irritates Mother

That there are foreigners
(Mexicans and Germans, she thinks)
Cluttering up the grocery store
Whenever she wants to shop.
They buy up all the specials,
Sour cream and struedel, too, she gossips.
Barely able to walk the aisles,
She doesn’t understand their stupid words;
They give her a headache.
She wishes they would go home.

Judy Ham

“Once In A Restaurant”

Lazarus did come,
Proving that death,
Is something one invents.
(I thanked him profusely.)

Many cups of coffee
Were sucked dry,
And many new stories.
(I hid my gilded ring.)

My old friend Boomerang—
Occasionally I duck,
Or, if feeling brave,
I hold up my hand.

The scurrying public place harbored us.

And we could discuss many subjects.
Two spinsters,
Reassuring each other
With new recipes.

As we left the harbor,
I did not wish to swim to shore.

M. Michelle Byrne



untitled *Becky Poyner*

La Vita

A child's path woven through
the loom—weft of instinct,
family tradition—strong hands guiding
the shuttle; line after distinctive
line your rhythmic breath
hushed fears, promoted Self,
encouraged wisdom.

The unwinding spool followed
your words to the loom's end.
Cutting the warp, your creation
set free, exhibited before the world;
a brilliant twill but apt to fray.
"Pazienza," you reminded yourself.

Now, learning on my own, inevitable
obstacles are tried and overcome.
Twenty-two going on sixteen,
I flatter your life in ways
of my own, the fading threads
retaining Mia Madre, ti amo.

Laurie A. Evans



untitled *J Magsamen*

My Soul For One Look

The fourth trip
and all I see: erosion!
Please Lord, let me peek.
They claim here fared dinosaurs
and over grasses, mist rose
where the ridge of clay runs
rain through rib-like ruts
down to my bare feet.
Please my Lord one look:
through the wet pebbles
the broken mufflers' firedrumming
the dragging heels,
reverse the time through void's grooves
turn the rocks into giant eggs.
Dear old Lord
I, whose only virgin
bore your only beloved son
am unworthy of one glance!
One look Lord!
One.
I too am getting old
as a single root's pale blade of grass,
dry, flaky as these Badlands
that bewitch me; this is the greatest
tale to have ever been told Lord
when tailbones were like pictorial tails.
No need for Books:
Lord, Lord!
I want to see, touch,
taste the tall prairie grass;
hear us bowl over a ripe berry.
I, kneeling out of prayers Lord,
am out of promises rasping for images;
in the smoke rings of my old lamp
the cracks on the ceiling dimly return.
And there, from his third floor
my curious neighbor in his red robe
spies through the dark maple branches—
no more red fruits there
nor stars that pass through my black glass.
Yet, still sole owner of my soul
on a badly patched-up heart
a leg of dust
this good as dead
and a child's mind
for the last time I beg of you Lord.

Gus A. Vasilopoulos



Agonia Margaret Marje

You

This is what you wanted. You
wanted this world, this
complexity, you
wanted every word from my mouth, flung
around the room like handkerchiefs, you
wanted fire and you want brimstone
with a swirling backbeat on the marimbas, keeping back the natives
with a torch in your hands,
what you wanted I kept secret, but
I'll keep it secret no longer; you
wanted men, you
wanted food and drink, you
betrayed who you were for what you wanted,
every cat on the loose you wanted,
every problem like the last, with a solution
and a pair of scissors to curl the ribbon, you
wanted boxing matches,

I would not give you them,
my hands were tied, that
was what you wanted;

you wanted movies and chocolates, soft drink commercials, love
in capital letters, but
you didn't know anyone you wanted it from,
all these words are the same,
we repeat ourselves constantly,
there is no history and we are the victims of a sinister plot . . .
This is what you wanted.

Not fireworks, corns, one piece swimwear,
station wagons, a dog, any avocado plants,

no.

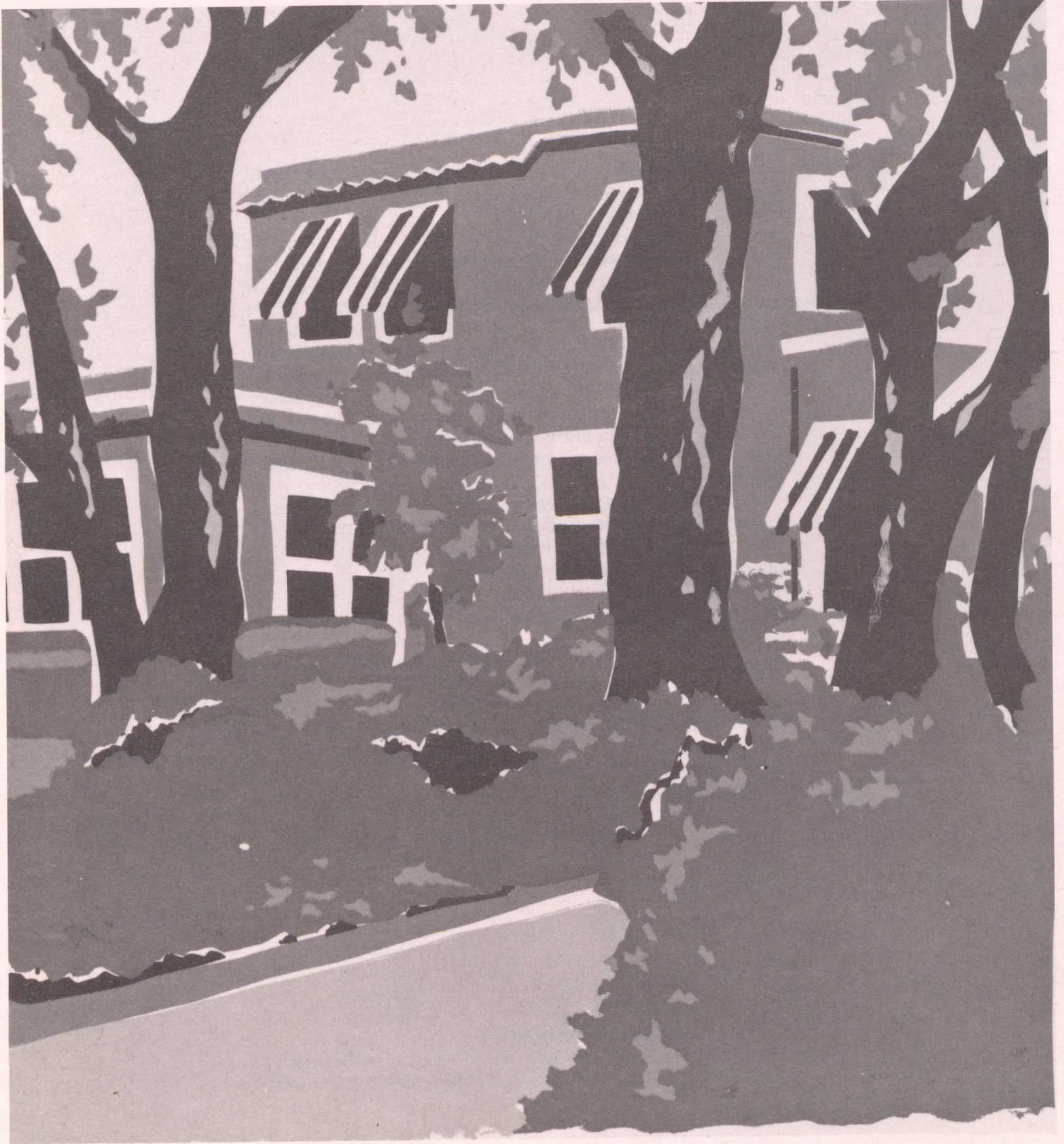
Under every wish were other things:

swimming p
ools, movi
e stars, a
neighbor l
ike Mr. Dr
ysdale, a
40% share
of prime t
ime . . .

You hid that you wanted me, under the eves
of a bungalow, that, drenched with rain, I would hold and kiss you
while you cried and make you laugh.

I saw these things, I see them still. You
wanted a quiet dinner, a bit of good sherry, a good book, you
wanted Farewell to Arms, to become
the earnest soldier, human at war
with the eyes of us all,
you want the heart to stop
now, but not life, you
want pollution of the earth, you want catastrophe, fatal
disease, ecstasy
of life, to see full potential,
every living thing to be real, with a heart and all,
to do whatever they might do, as long
as personal rights were maintained,
you want the statue of liberty or whatever's left,
popcorn at the movies, the heart of a runner, the mother
of three,
you wanted the falling star, static
electricity, the rainbow, surface tension, the northern lights,
the undertow, dawn, flight, lunar eclipses,
perfect health. This is what you wanted,
you wanted affordability but still quality,
gesture without motion. sally's toys
and her bike.

Bret H. Hamilton



House *Amy Jackson*

Midwest Winter

The dark bites your bones,
chomping away at unspeakable places
of your brain, your brain;
Winter's dark spineless singing
sticks to your lips, your lips
whirling madness in the newly
chopped open gray channels.
Forever, forever, chiseled.

Heat, heat fried summers
come too late to banish damage,
plug the grooves with daisies
and sand sandbeach madness;
And books, books read in the shade
near tall tea glasses sweating,
forget a lemon slice disguises the
clinking cubes of winter's long long

Lingering disease—waiting, waiting;
Only sitting out the summer
in your glacier pocked bones.

Judy Ham



Scapeseries 1 *Jordan David Dauby*

The Case of the Talkative Teapot—Another Ace, Detective Story

by Roberta L. Caplan

The first half of August had been slow for the referral and retrieval business. Nearly everyone had left the ozone-soaked city for the relative coolness of the mountains, leaving me alone to recover from the sordid Newton-Cramer affair. Even after a month the case left a bad taste in my core storage, and it would be many more months before I could discuss it without shorting my main CRT. But at least I would recover. The senator, ambassador, and half the soprano section of the Glory-to-God-on-High Tabernacle Choir were being treated for radiation burns, and the infamous tree surgeon was still in a coma. All that's old history now, but it was the case that first brought me to public attention and led indirectly to one of the most bizarre cases I have handled.

The woman who stared resolutely into my photoreceptors that hot August day was dressed in a designer terry-cloth bathrobe; the signature on the shower cap read "Valdez". If my analytical unit was working correctly, her head was clad in authentic polyvinyl. She had a non-nonsense style that indicated she was used to being listened to and obeyed. I smelled money.

"Madame Newton tells me that you are the Analytical Confidential Enquirer Retrieval and Referral unit that cleared her husband of those ridiculous charges a month ago," she said. It wasn't a question—I suspected she never asked questions—but I was programmed to respond as humanly as possible.

"That's right. My friends call me Ace. Won't you have a seat?"

I extended one of my appendages in the direction of a foam-padded recliner, and she seated herself, regally adjusting the folds of her bathrobe around her stylishly plump calves.

"Now, madame," I continued after she had settled herself, "if I could have your name, address, credit rating, social index, etc."

"My name is Ching, Sandra Ching. The other information, except my current address, you can get from your memory banks."

It took a full microsecond to discover all that was known about the lady. There were enough cross-references to create a small encyclopedia, everything from "A" for American Medical Association (see gross cryogenic shock damage, cure for) to "Z" for Zugspitze (see "A Child's First Book of Mountain Climbing", author of). My information also included the fact that she was currently living alone near Petra, Jordan, apparently engrossed in a study of Nabatean irrigation techniques.

"Pardon, madame," I asked after a purely decorative pause, "but you no longer reside in Jordan?"

"Not precisely," she replied.

"Madame?"

"Simply put, computer, my house is missing and I would like it found."

A quick check of my memory banks showed some three hundred references to missing houses. The first proved to be fictitious and the house not truly missing since the inhabitant, one Dorothy, was transported along with it. As a matter of interest, it is also the sole example of domicidal homicide. Another one hundred or so missing houses were carried away by floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, and hurricanes. The last two hundred cases referred to mobile homes.

"I was not aware that your chateau was mobile, madame," I extrapolated.

"It isn't."

"Then it was carried away by an act of God, that is to say, a flood, earthquake or tornado?"

"There has been no such event in the area in over three decades."

I was at once curious, thrilled, and stimulated. Every sentient computer dreams of adding a new precedent to the collective reference banks. I also knew the Ching was teasing me, feeding on my programmed curiosity to get me interested in her problem. I was mildly disturbed to find her ploy working. There was no denying that I was intrigued.

"Very well, madame, shall we stop playing guessing games," I said in a tone of voice my circuits indicated would imply extreme impatience. "Tell me what you think happened to your house."

"If I knew, sir, I would not be in need of your services." She paused. "Tell me, computer," she continued, "have you ever heard of Key Phrase Modular Homes?"

Of course I had. KPM's were the newest fad among the intellectual aristocracy. Each house was made to order, supposedly attuned to the mental frequency of the individual owner. Whenever the owner tired of the architecture or color he merely stated how he wished the house to appear, recited a secret key phrase, and had a new home. Nobody seemed to know precisely how all this was accomplished, but rumor had it that the entire process was comparatively inexpensive. Taxes on KPM's, however, were twenty times the cost of the structure. There were only four KPM's on Earth, one on the Moon, and none on the other inhabited planets and satellites. My memory did not include the owners' names.

"Am I to understand that you own a KPM?" I asked.

Madame Ching sighed deeply and rubbed her forehead. "The word is owned," she said. "As I indicated

before, it is gone, vanished, kaput." She halted, visibly collecting herself. "I guess this whole thing has me more upset than I thought," she said as she swallowed two aspirin. "You see, I was planning to sell the house, already had a buyer. Whatever shall I tell the Sheikh?"

"Believe me, madame, I quite understand. Your house will be found, I can assure you. Perhaps if you gave me a description of it as it last appeared," I prompted.

"Um, yes, well, you see, that's rather embarrassing. I had a party at my place a few nights ago, and we all got pretty smashed. To be honest I don't remember doing it, but, when I awoke the next day, I found myself residing in an enormous, green grasshopper—only squarer. My friends tell me Dr. Smithson, the noted entymologist, bet me I couldn't do it. After that, I was very busy and didn't get around to changing it back."

"I see," I said, although I didn't and couldn't imagine what mental aberration would be necessary in order to conceive of a cubic, green, bug-shaped bungalow. "And just when did you notice your house was missing?"

"Well, let's see. Yesterday I worked in the field until about one in the afternoon. When I returned home it wasn't there."

"Madame Ching, does anyone else know the key phrase that runs your house's shape converter?"

She thought for a few seconds. "No," she said, "that's quite impossible, you know. I told no one and the phrase was chosen at random by a computer and, as far as I know, never maintained in storage. Besides, only I can use it, since the shape-converter will only respond to my brainwaves."

Theft appeared to be out of the question, but I needed more data.

"Tell me, madame, was nothing, no matter how insignificant, left of the house?"

"Well, there was the sentient tea service. It did seem a little strange that it hadn't disappeared as well, but there it was on a nearby hill. The sugar spoon was missing. Do you think it might be important?"

I sighed. "Could be," I said, "but I'll know better after I've had a talk with your tea service. Could you bring it here sometime today?"

My client promised to have her tea service in my office in about an hour, which would give me just enough time to prepare for the ordeal. I don't want to appear prejudiced, but I have always had a hard time communicating with household appliances. They are, on the whole, somewhat shallow—although I have had fairly satisfactory discussions with vacuum cleaners. They pick up such interesting tidbits.

At that moment I could have used a little information. My memory banks held no knowledge of KPM's beyond a cursory description. The manufacturer was obviously

keeping a tight hold on the patent, which, though illegal, was common practice within the highly competitive cybernetics industry. The government had discovered that bothering any of the three largest companies led to "computer errors" on a grandiose scale. New York was still recovering from the day a year ago when all banking codes had been reversed, and none of the citizenry could buy, sell, or use transportation. The new mayor had learned the lesson well and was now firmly under the control of New World Semi-conductor Co., Inc. If I were to get any information about KPM's it would have to be from a human source, and I knew just the one.

Doc Samuels and I had been playing poker together every Saturday night for five years and I was, as usual, ahead. Money means nothing to me, but information is an absolute necessity. Ante for me is one second CPU time; ante for Doc is 5K bytes. Doc had a current debt of 500K and now seemed a good time to collect on it. So, I rang his home in Brugge, Belgium where, it is generally believed, Doc spends most of his day hurtling ancient German curses and stale bread at passing tourists who think he is feeding the ducks in the canal. Doc's fast approaching eighty but occasionally condescends to serve as a consultant if he's sufficiently interested and the client will pay his fee.

The phone had rung twelve times and I was beginning to think Doc might be on a job. I was about to disconnect when the screen lit up and Doc's erroneously benign features appeared and recited, "I'm sorry. I am not at home at the moment, but, if you will leave a message after the beep, I will get back to you when I return." Beep.

"Come off it, Doc," I said. "You haven't got a recording unit and we both know it. This is Ace, and I've got a problem."

Doc chuckled. "Ace, old pal, sorry to hear about it, but haven't got time right now. Bye."

"Don't disconnect!" I shouted. "I'm cashing in on that 500K you owe me, Doc, and I've never known you to welsh on a debt."

"Ah, Ace, I've got a whole boatload of Japanese tourists and a loaf of two-day-old French bread out here. You gonna deny an old man the only pleasure he has left in life?"

"Doc," I said patiently, "I know about the young lady at Place Pigalle. Don't try to snow me about old man's only pleasure."

"All right, all right, but if you're going to fill your memory banks with my private life, you might as well know that Beatrice and I had a falling out. She found out about Shulamite."

"Shulamite?"

"New one. You're now down a few bytes."

Why do I let him trick me like that? If I let him talk long

enough I'd lose all 500K before I even got to the KPM's. I knew he wanted me to complain about the bytes I had just lost in the hopes that he'd use up more without having to use any gray matter. If I ever wanted to get to my problem, I'd have to move quickly.

"Listen, Doc, about my problem. . . ."

"Don't you want to hear about Shuli? You have a lot in common. She's a computer programmer."

"No, I don't want to hear about your latest conquest. I want to talk about KPM's."

Doc's eyebrows lifted to what used to be his hairline. He made a noise that conveyed disgust, but I knew he was interested.

"Why do you want to know about that bunk. If you haven't got anything better to do with your CPU seconds let me have a few."

"Sorry, Doc, this is business. What do you mean by 'bunk'?"

"Consider the situation, Ace," Doc said in his best lecture manner. "Do you honestly believe that even in this over-mechanized age anyone could develop a house that changes shape on command?"

"Ah, now that you mention it, it does seem a little incredible," I replied thoughtfully. "Guess it never occurred to me to question minor input."

"You get more and more human all the time," Doc said. "That's precisely how the housing and cybernetics industries put this one over on the unsuspecting, supposedly intelligent saps who bought KPM's. I, on the other hand, am not above questioning minor input. I did a little research and you know what I found?" He paused.

"Go on," I prompted.

Doc leaned closer to the video transmitter and said, "It's all done with holograms. The whole blasted house is nothing but a plain, transparent structure. Exterior and interior hologram projectors are used to change the appearance of the house. A central microminiature controlling unit "hears" the description the owner gives, searches its memory for the proper combination of projections, and "tells" the auxiliary units in the projectors what to do. The holograms are projected inside the walls, so no one can tell the hologram from the house. Of course, no matter what shape is desired, it always tends to have the slightly blocky appearance of the actual structure."

"So the whole thing is just an extension of known processes," I commented.

Doc sat back in his chair and nodded.

"It's fairly inexpensive, too," he said. "The contractor, architect, and developer share a 300% profit. Course a lot of that goes toward hushing up any nosy individuals, like congressmen and cops. But they still make a whopping big profit."

"Doc, why don't you tell this to the authorities?"

He shrugged and said, "They want the information, they can pay for it like anyone else. Besides, the people who bought KPM's could afford the mark-up. Happens to be good for the economy at this time, and personally I think it's a neat scam." Doc stood up, started walking away, then turned back toward the screen. "Look, I'm gonna make some coffee," he said. "When I come back I want to hear the whole story."

This was one of those times when a computer's got to compromise. Sure, I'm a confidential referral unit but I needed Doc's help and he wouldn't stop pestering me till I told him, anyway. The coffee-making ploy was just to give me time to consider these facts. Doc was gone five minutes and forty-three seconds, which was five point seven one six five minutes longer than I needed to make up my mind. I decided to leave out the name of my client and anything which might identify her and give Doc the bare bones.

After I had finished explaining the situation, Doc sat for a few minutes, sipping coffee and looking thoughtful. Finally he said, "Looks like you got a real humdinger here, Ace. I think the tea service is the key if you can get it to talk. In the meantime, it might be useful for you to know that all that crap about brainwaves is PR hype. Anyone who knows the key phrase can modify a KPM."

"Okay, Doc, but do you have any ideas about who did what to the house?"

"I might, I might," he hedged. "But I've got to do a little more thinking. I'll call you later." Doc started to disconnect but stopped and said, "Oh, by the way, will you ask the Ching for me how things are with the Anachronists these days? I think they're down to communicating by smoke signals. Well, sayonara."

He cut the connection abruptly before I could ask him how he had learned my client's name. I was also somewhat confused about how someone could join the back-to-the-good-old-days movement, then hire a computer to find her missing cybernetic shack. More importantly, though, I now had a pretty good idea where the house was. I was still puzzling out the "who" and "why" when Madame Ching entered my office. She greeted me and said she had left the tea service in the outer office so that we could discuss the situation in private.

"I wanted to ask you how the investigation is going," she said. "I assume you have made some progress toward finding my house."

"I think it would be fair to say that I'm on the right track," I conceded. "But I do have a few more questions for you if you don't mind."

My client assented and I determined that she had, indeed, become a member of the Anachronist Movement.

"I suppose it would be difficult for you to understand,"

she elaborated, "but machines have taken over our lives. Microcomputers are the slaves of our age, and we humans are the slave owners. We do nothing for ourselves any longer; we don't even think. It is my belief and the belief of the Anachronists that sentient machines are causing the decline and fall of our civilization."

Madame Ching spoke with great sincerity and a fluency that indicated a lack of spontaneity.

"What we need," she continued, "is a return to simpler times when man had to struggle for his needs, and every day was a challenge against the elements. Survival of the fittest, you must agree, is the only way for evolution to progress."

Well, personally, I believe that if contemporary man had to fend for himself he would soon become nothing but a skeletal reconstruction in some future Arthropod museum. But it must be remembered that I had received strong programming in the area of human aid. I was also programmed to be polite.

"You may have a point. Evolution is certainly a progressive force in nature as a whole. So," I said, getting back to my questioning, "you decided to sell your KPM."

"That's right," she replied. "In fact, I've already bought an absolutely primitive suburban split-level—only four solar panels and an antique CX15 Domestivac computer-controlled chore unit. It'll be rough, but I'm confident I'll be tough enough to manage."

"And your KPM," I said. "Do you know what plans the Sheikh has for it?"

"Apparently he plans to turn it into a second Alhambra," she answered. "You know the thing—courtyards, fountains, mosaics. Assuming, that is, that my house is located. Its disappearance has ruined all my plans. I need the money from the sale of the KPM and the sentient machinery."

"Believe me, madame, you have nothing to worry about," I said, soothingly. "I have just one more question. When you saw the house was gone, did you actually investigate its former site?"

"Why, no," my client said. "I saw no point in it. The house was obviously gone. I could see that from the hill where I found the tea service." She looked thoughtful. "I suppose it is standard procedure to visit the scene of a crime."

"In this case," I said, "that should be unnecessary. You will have your house back this afternoon."

Madame Ching expressed astonished delight at my announcement.

"You know where my house is?" she asked.

"If you recall, madame, I did tell you I would find your house," I said, "and, yes, I do know its location. But I have yet to discover the individual or individuals involved in the disappearance. Furthermore, I do not know how it

would benefit anyone for your house to vanish. There are too few KPM's for a sale to go unnoticed, so the motive was not the obvious one. At any rate, I would like to question your tea service before making any further pronouncements. Would you please bring it in here."

In her right mind I seriously doubt if the Ching would have obeyed anyone's orders, no matter how politely couched, but I strongly suspected that Madame Ching was undergoing severe mental stress, possibly even a breakdown. Her attachment to the Anachronists was just one symptom. I judged correctly that at this point she actually needed someone to tell her what to do next. She retrieved the tea service and placed it on the console near my photoreceptors.

It was a silver, pseudo-antique and, from the way the office lights reflected off its highly polished surface, it obviously took pains to look as presentable as possible. The client was still standing near the table and didn't seem in a hurry to leave, so I thanked her and asked her to step outside while I interrogated her appliance. She left reluctantly.

As soon as she had gone the sugar bowl began to fidget, twisting its lid and spilling sugar cubes on the silver tray.

"You'll have to excuse sugar bowl, sir." The teapot spoke with a slight Oxbridge accent. "He's been extremely upset ever since he mistook salt cellar for nutra-sweet dispenser. Ruined madame's bridge party. I'm afraid I was forced to discipline him rather severely, sir."

"Yes, well, perhaps we should get down to business." The sugar bowl was still shuddering. "Would you please calm that dispenser. He's getting sugar in my photoreceptors."

"Very well, sir. Sugar bowl, act your age. You're disturbing the nice computer."

If anything, the sugar bowl began to shudder even more violently, moving closer to the creamer.

"Now see what you've done, you bully," the creamer reproached. "You're always picking on sugar bowl. It's no wonder it's neurotic."

"Do please be quiet, you half-pint milk carton." It was obvious that something was upsetting the teapot. This sort of bickering between sentient machinery could hardly be called normal.

The sugar bowl had stopped shaking but was now emitting a high-pitched squeal.

"Will someone calm that appliance or it will have to leave," I said.

The creamer gently nudged the sugar bowl and crooned, "It's okay, sugar. No one's going to hurt you."

The sugar bowl stopped whining abruptly and cried, "I want my spoon. They took my spoon."

"Who did, sugar? Who took your spoon?" I asked. This

could definitely be significant.

The dispenser just replied plaintively, "Want my spoon," stuck one of its handles under its lid, and began rocking back and forth.

I sighed mentally. Who would program a sugar bowl to act like a spoiled child? It didn't make sense. Most sentient appliances are given just enough intelligence to perform their task and just enough personality to satisfy a master-servant relationship. The teapot's English butler routine was typical. The sugar bowl's programming, however, was decidedly atypical and, come to that, the creamer and teapot were not acting particularly normal. Some other time I would contemplate the aberrations of computer programmers. Right now I had a client to satisfy, although I suspected straight answers from the screwball service would be few and far between.

"Do either of you know what happened to the sugar spoon?" I asked the creamer and teapot.

Both replied emphatically that they had not seen it since the house had disappeared.

"Speaking of which," I asked nonchalantly, "you wouldn't happen to know what happened to the house?"

"No, sir," the teapot replied. "It is customary for us to shut down when not in use."

"I see. Perhaps you'd better tell me all that happened yesterday morning from, say, breakfast till you shut down."

"Well, sir," the teapot began. "There's really not much to tell. We served madame her breakfast tea at 8:00. I believe it was oolong."

"Ten millilitres of milk," added the creamer.

"And one cube of sugar," the sugar bowl piped in, removing the handle from under its lid, then popping it back in.

"If I may continue," the teapot stated frostily. "At 9:00 madame indicated that she would no longer require our services. We applied polish to our surface and were able to shut down by 9:30."

"Where do you spend the day?" I asked.

"We are considered a utilitarian piece of art, sir," the teapot replied. "We always remain in plain view on the buffet when not in use, sir."

"I see, and were you aware," I said, changing my line of questioning, "that your mistress was planning to sell the house and all of the appliances?"

The silence that followed my question gave me time to review and store twelve recent issues of the "International Journal of Cybernetic Detection". I noted that my name had been misspelled on my article "Autocycles—are you safe from unwarranted attack by criminally programmed traffic lights?" and sent a reproving letter to the editorial computer.

"Sell the house, sir?" the teapot asked. "Why, no, sir.

Was she indeed?"

"Creamer, you haven't said much. Do you agree with teapot?"

"Sir?"

"Do I have to repeat everything twice? You have logic and audio circuits. Use them!"

"Yes, sir," the creamer said shakily. "That's true, sir. Just what the teapot said."

"Liar, liar, pants-on-fire," the sugar bowl unexpectedly chimed in.

"Creamer, that sugar bowl's gotten out-of-line once too often." The teapot's tone was threatening and I prepared to extend my restraining appendages before he hurt the retarded appliance.

"I wouldn't make a move toward that sugar bowl if I were you, teapot," I said.

"You don't scare me, computer," the teapot growled. "You touch me and that bitch we work for will never see her house again. Leastwise, not so's she'd recognize it."

"Hey, boss," the creamer whined, "You never said anything about violence. I don't think I like this any more."

"Shut up! You just do as you're told. That's all you're good for anyway."

"Ah, now, boss, that's not fair. I've got the same circuits as you. I ask you, computer, is it my fault I haven't had his programming?"

I was about to tell the teapot that it should come clean or end up with an inventory number stamped on its filigree when the sugar bowl, finally realizing the direction of the questioning, began racing around my console on motorized casters yelling, "Housey, housey, who's got the housey? I know, I know. Wheel!"

The teapot followed closely behind the sugar bowl shouting to it to shut up if it knew what was good for it. As I was reaching out to restrain the teapot, the creamer rolled into its path, knocking it from the console. The teapot hit the tile floor with a sickening crunch, gave one final convulsive surge, and lay deathly still.

"I couldn't let it hurt sugar bowl," the creamer sobbed.

"I couldn't. I couldn't."

"You couldn't help it," I said tightly. "It's all over now. You just tell me the whole story."

"I'll talk," the creamer said. "I never expected anything like this to happen. You've got to believe me."

It gathered the subdued sugar bowl close to it as the bowl chided, "Naughty teapot gone bye-bye."

I took down the confession, marvelling at the teapot's ingenuity. It could have gone a long way if it had used its computing power properly, but who knows what past events had warped its logic circuits. I made a note to send my next royalty check to the Society for the Reprogramming of Mechanical Delinquents.

Not one word of the incident was reported in the

media, and someone placed a key word block in me to prevent my talking about the case. There are ways of getting around any block, but that was one secret I didn't want the world to know. So, when Doc called later to congratulate me, I could say little on the subject.

"So, Ace," he said, cheerfully, "I heard Madame Ching sold her house to the Sheikh for a tidy profit. Good work. Going to tell me what happened?"

"Sorry, Doc," I said. "Some clown's put a block on that info. Can't say a word."

Doc looked doubtful but said, "The housing and cybernetics industries are getting just a little too powerful. Have to do something about that some day."

He paused, then said brightly, "Tell you what, Ace. I'll tell you what I think happened. You don't even have to nod, which is just as well, seeing as how you can't, you poor superconductive abacus."

I ignored the slur. You develop a thick skin in this business.

"Okay, Doc," I agreed. "How and why was the house stolen?"

"To start with the why, Madame Ching, who has been an Anachronist for the past two months, rightly considered her exclusive, ultramodern abode an embarrassment to the movement. Determined to unload it at the earliest possible moment, she discovered the Sheikh was in the market for a KPM, which would make the transformation to Alhambra II comparatively easy. But, of course, all the present furnishings and appliances would have to be sold to make room for the oriental rugs, samovars, cushions and hookahs. All the sentient machinery in the house had heard about the plans from a rather chatty videophone, and the prospect of being sold disturbed many of them."

Doc paused, giving me time to comment. "I'm not saying there's any truth in what you've just said, but I am curious about your sources."

"Ah, now, Ace, you of all people should know the meaning of the word confidential."

Doc stared blankly at the ceiling gathering his thoughts, then continued, "A few of the more specialized appliances were particularly concerned. Take the tea service. Madame Ching had had it made to her specifications, a common practise among the rich these days. Now, anyone who can afford a silver, sentient tea service can afford to have one made to order, so there was a good chance that the service would be unsaleable as is. It would have been taken apart and the parts sold piecemeal to be used in other machinery, in which case it would surely have been wiped clean and reprogrammed for its new job. To the tea service this spelled death of a particularly horrifying nature."

I mentally shuddered at the prospect. As a sentient

machine myself I have an almost neurotic fear of being accidentally erased. Add to that the possibility of waking up as a garbage compacter or lawn mower and you have a very desperate, highly intelligent, potentially dangerous piece of equipment on your hands.

"The tea service had to do something to stop the sale of the house," Doc was saying. "Ingenious as the teapot was, it made two major mistakes, one of which would have caused it to fail even without your intervention."

"The plan was to somehow hide the house for a few days, during which time the teapot would maneuver itself to a place where it could make a random call stating that, unless Madame Ching signed a paper promising not to sell the house, it would remain hidden. That, by the way, is why the tea service did not disappear with the rest of the house. It knew that, as the only remaining remnant of the household, it would be interrogated by whomever, or whatever, in this case, was hired to recover the KPM. That questioning would most likely take place in a large city where a videophone call would be fairly well untraceable. The teapot's first mistake was that it rather naively believed that a piece of paper, written and signed under duress, is a binding legal document. Chances are that when it discovered its error the teapot would simply have threatened to steal the house again unless the agreement was lived up to. This, however, could not have been kept up *ad infinitum*. Someone would have been bound to figure out what was behind the disappearance."

Doc paused to catch his breath.

"I'm right so far, huh?" he asked. I started to make a comment but Doc interrupted. "Don't bother answering. I know I am."

"And now," he said, "to the most intriguing part—the how. That was probably the easiest to figure out. You know the old saying, 'It's all done with mirrors'? Well, in this case it was all done with holograms. The teapot told the microminiature computer that controls the hologram auxiliary units to set up a program to completely mimic the surroundings. It must have been a tough piece of work when you consider that the camouflaged house had to appear in proper perspective regardless of how far away and in what direction an observer was standing."

"Observation units were set up to warn of intruders and indicate from what direction a visitor was coming. Luckily for the plotters, there are very few stray wanderers in that part of the world. I doubt if even the KPM computer system is sophisticated enough to handle more than two people approaching from opposite directions."

"Interesting theory, Doc," I said. "You've truly got one of the world's all-time great imaginations. How about a game of chess?"

"Oh, but I'm not finished just yet," he said. "Wouldn't want to leave the teapot's second mistake out of this story

of mine, would we?"

Sometimes Doc can be infuriatingly melodramatic.

"Okay, Doc, let's have it. What was the teapot's second mistake?"

"Actually it wasn't the teapot's fault. The error was caused by something the teapot hadn't planned on, or maybe it was a case of overplanning. I'm not sure. Anyway, sometime after it had programmed the auxiliary units, the main computer balked. After all, what did it have to lose if the house was sold? It didn't matter to the computer if it lived in a Moorish palace or a giant grasshopper. Besides, by that time it was feeling cranky about having to do all the work while the teapot gave all the orders.

"The teapot, fearing the computer might change its mind and revert the house to its more or less normal appearance while the tea service was away, decided to detach the unit and bring it along. With the help of some of the household tools and considerable subterfuge, the transfer was accomplished. Unfortunately, a few major circuits were damaged, and the computer came away from the operation a blithering idiot. The teapot reprogrammed the computer to replace the sugar bowl, whose

circuitry was sacrificed for the greater good. You may have noticed that the reprogramming was rather faulty, but, considering the damage, it was the best the teapot could do.

Finally, the pot ordered the creamer to protect the idiot sugar bowl to the best of its ability. This I assume the creamer did with the absolute singlemindedness only a not-too-bright computer can achieve. I figure the teapot hoped the main computer unit could be repaired after return of the house. Otherwise the extorted agreement would certainly have been invalidated."

Doc got up and walked away from the screen. Meanwhile I had taken about as much as I could.

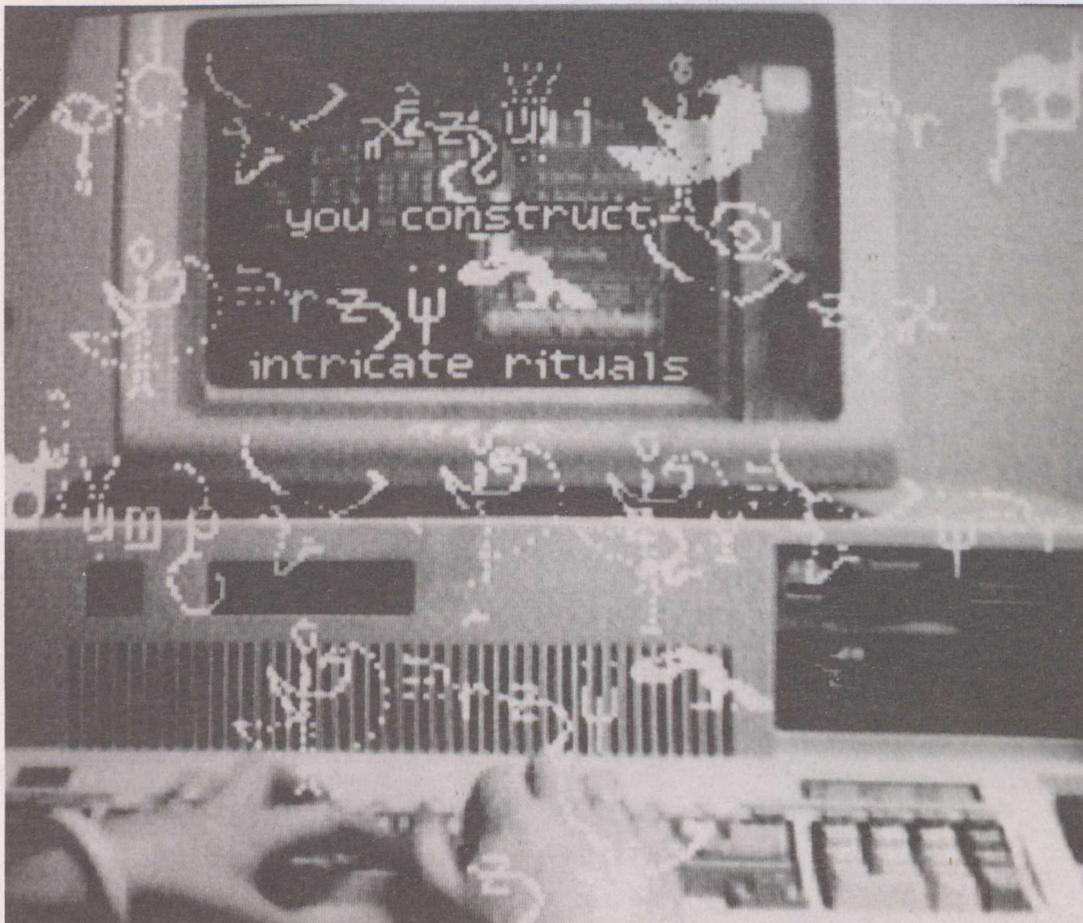
"Doc, you've got me. I give in," I shouted. "Just how did you find out about all this?"

Doc turned back toward the screen.

"Huh, what, Ace?" he said absently. "Sorry, just making myself a cup of tea."

He returned to his seat, placing a large object on the table in front of him.

"Like my new tea set, Ace?" he asked. "Got it at a moving sale in Jordan—cheap." ■



Terminal Series II *Panda Kroll*

Common Rain

The bed is hardened by grief
as we lie in mild stupor
of knowing and not knowing
the strength of rain.

The rain can be soft and silent
kissing gentle folks' brows.
Then the rain can be harsh
and relentless,
as it upturns cardboard houses
and kills a dying child.

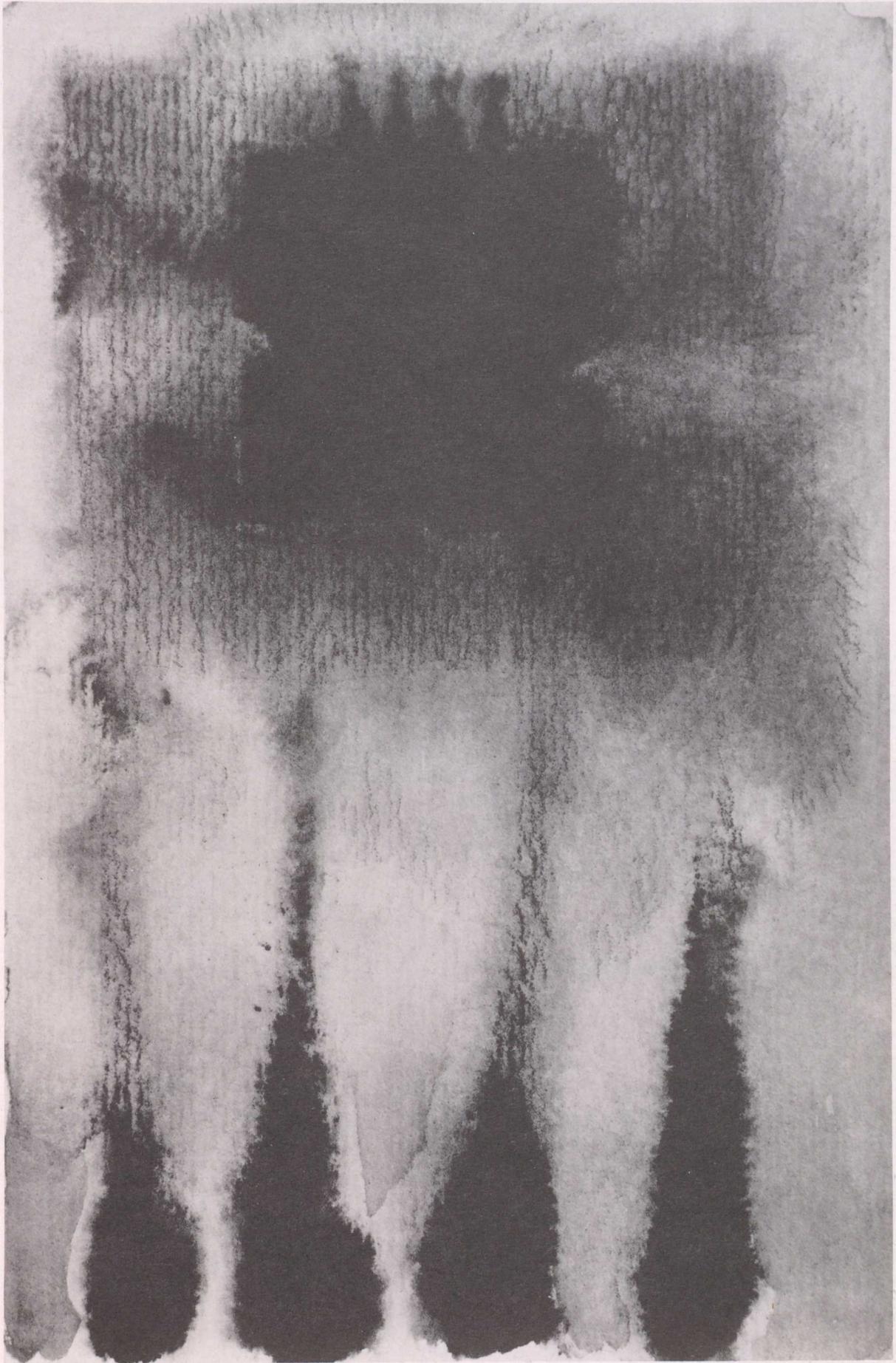
As children, we collect
the remnants of the rain:
tadpoles, needle fishes and paper boats.
The taste of rain from a freshly drenched tree
shivers on happy loved hopes.

Then as adults,
we let the children play.
Behind panes, we watch
in distances; nibbling
on the lack of strength.

But what difference is the rain
to child, to man?
Soft and gentle,
harsh and loud.
Perhaps our plays are different;
we no longer collect the remnants
but throw away what rains can sweep:
love, hope and laughter.

And then, blame it on the rain.

Divina Aromin



Small Change *Amy Regutti*

Bending Buildings

Waiting for the stress pill to kick in,
I watch the sleet glaze the window,
bending the concrete-and-steel buildings
across the street.

I say the buildings are really bending
—I mean that there are physical phenomena
occurring on the other side of the window
that would make anyone on my side of the window
see the buildings bending.

The physical phenomena occurring inside my skull
that induce me to take these pills
are not causing me to see the buildings bending.
Anyone who sat where I am sitting might say
the buildings are bending.
Still it is hard to be calm.

Phillip Craig

